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SECRET

C O N T E N T S

	<u>Page</u>
1. France-Vietnam-NLF	1
2. Laos	2
3. Israel-Syria	3
4. Guatemala	4
5. Costa Rica	5

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1. FRANCE-VIETNAM-NLF

France seems ready to permit the National Liberation Front (NLF), the political arm of the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, to station an unofficial representation in Paris.

Multiple French interests in South Vietnam have inhibited Paris from making such a move in the past. Recent events indicate, however, that Paris may now be little concerned about its relations with Saigon.

Since Saigon broke formal relations with Paris in June 1965, Paris has upgraded its representation in Hanoi and permitted Hanoi to raise the status of its trade mission in France to that of a delegation general. Moreover, Paris has left no doubt about its low regard for the Saigon government. Contending that the government is not representative, France maintains that any negotiations on Vietnam would have to include all parties to the conflict, specifically the NLF.

An NLF "information office" in Paris would in actuality function as a political office, similar to the North Vietnamese delegation general. A prime consideration in French thinking is the belief that the NLF will play a predominant role in any future government. In the light of its belief that such a government might well be Communist, the French see certain advantages to getting in on the ground floor.

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2. LAOS

The dissolution of Laos' National Assembly on 7 October by King Savang provided Premier Souvanna with at least an initial victory over hostile deputies. Souvanna's triumph, however, may complicate his working relations with the next assembly. The new body, tentatively to be elected on 1 January, will probably include many of the same members.

Political tensions began rising in mid-August, when rightist deputies, seeking a greater role in the government, demanded that some of their number be named to vacant cabinet positions. The crisis stage was reached on 16 September when the assembly rejected the proposed government budget. Some older deputies later sought a compromise, but Souvanna refused and gained the King's reluctant agreement to dissolve the assembly.

If present election laws continue in force, the rightists, supported by the army, can probably pick up representation at the expense of the neutralists, whose political strength has been sapped by defections and internal bickering. The Communists, as usual, will boycott the elections.

Although Souvanna has moved toward the right during the past two years, he remains determined to preserve at least the facade of a tripartite government despite his disillusionment with both neutralists and Communists.

As the neutralists' political strength has diminished, their military forces under Kong Le have greatly declined in significance, and their weak assertions of independence serve only to lower Souvanna's estimation of them. Eventually the neutralists--both political and military--will be totally absorbed by the left and right, polarizing the Laotian scene.

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3. ISRAEL-SYRIA

The situation along the Israeli-Syrian border remains critical and there is evidence of increased military activity on the part of both countries.

Feeling is running high in Israel as a result of the death of four policemen on 8 October when a mine exploded beneath their jeep near the Syrian border. The Israelis also blame Syrian-supported terrorists for incidents on 7 and 14 October along the Jordanian border.

Thus far the official Israeli reaction has been restrained. Israel has appealed for "diplomatic pressure" on Syria to end the "guerrilla warfare" along the border, and on 14 October Israeli Foreign Minister Eban called upon the UN Security Council to take the measures necessary to prevent aggression in the Middle East.

Further terrorist incidents along the Syrian border almost certainly will draw an aggressive Israeli military response of greater magnitude than in the past. In view of the terrain advantage enjoyed by the Syrians, an Israeli strike would probably involve the use of air power and possibly paratroops.

Syria has warned that an Israeli retaliatory strike would trigger an all-out war. However, in view of Israel's demonstrated military superiority, it is doubtful that Syria would attack Israel in force. In the event of an Israeli strike, Syria would probably receive only vocal support from her Arab neighbors.

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4. GUATEMALA

Increased antiguerrilla efforts by the Guatemalan Army have eased the threat of a coup against President Mendez. Five companies already have been added to the brigades in the northeast, and sweeps of designated areas have begun.

Cesar Montes, the new leader of the Communist Party's action arm, the FAR, recently declared that the FAR would suspend the period of nonviolence and take up arms to defend itself if the army continued to attack its areas. FAR added that the fight would go on until its objective--the seizure of power--was accomplished.

Military operations against the guerrillas in the past have not been as large as those presently en train and have not proved successful. The latest antiguerrilla activities may quiet discontented younger officers who have complained that the regime was not fighting the insurgents.

Meanwhile, rightist coup plotters of the National Liberation Movement (MLN) and military commanders involved in the plotting with them have been unable to secure military support from colleagues in the Guatemalan military or from Central American neighbors.

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[REDACTED] MLN leaders are discouraged with the military and hope to provoke a "civil war situation" by starting antiguerrilla activities in rural areas and carrying out reprisals against Communists and sympathizers in Guatemala City if the FAR resumes urban terrorism. [REDACTED]

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5. COSTA RICA

Costa Rica's opposition National Liberation Party (PLN) has decided on an aggressive anti-government policy of "open political war just short of bullets."

These are the words of defeated presidential candidate Daniel Oduber, who is directing the party's majority in the legislature. Other party leaders apparently feel that only by a resort to arms can the party survive.

Following his election--which the PLN maintains was fraudulent--Trejos set out to curtail or abolish programs and institutions established by previous PLN administrations which his followers claim are "socialist." The PLN reacted to this and to the dismissal of PLN officeholders by harassing the administration in the legislature. The PLN has voted down much-needed loans and has pushed through measures designed to make Trejos break his campaign promise to reduce taxes.

The PLN's recent legislative sabotage of Trejos' budget submission set off a chain of events which suggests that both sides are intent on a head-on collision.

Partisan threats of a resort to arms are not empty, even though the tradition of democratic, peaceful politics is strong in Costa Rica. There are four private militia groups in the country, including the PLN's security wing, sometimes referred to as the private army of PLN founder Jose Figueres. The party came close to calling out its militia after Oduber lost the presidency in the February election.

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